

Building a Community Response to Support Families and Protect Children: Lessons Learned From Senate Bill 595 Communities

March 1997

Table of Contents

- [Acknowledgements](#)
- [Introduction](#)
- [Implementing Child Protection Reform](#)
 - [Principles Guiding Division of Family Services Implementation of Legislation](#)
 - [SB 595-A New Direction for Keeping Children Safe](#)
 - [A Dual Response to Reports](#)
 - [Demonstration Areas at a Glance](#)
 - [Central Area](#)
 - [South Central Area](#)
 - [Jasper and Newton Counties](#)
 - [Barton, Cedar, and Dade Counties](#)
 - [St. Louis Metropolitan Area](#)
 - [Jefferson County](#)
 - [St. Charles County](#)
 - [St. Louis County](#)
 - [St. Louis City](#)
 - [Washington County Area](#)
 - [Getting Ready for Implementation](#)
 - [Community Meetings](#)
 - [Training Sessions](#)
 - [Statewide Networking](#)
 - [Resource Materials](#)
 - [On-Site Assistance](#)
- [Lessons Learned](#)
- [Future Challenges and Opportunities](#)
- [Summary](#)

Acknowledgments

To implement a child protection reform initiative, Citizens for Missouri's Children, the Missouri Division of Family Services, and the Family and Community Trust formed a unique collaboration. The collaboration aimed to support communities in their implementation through a range of activities including training, networking, and on-site assistance.

All three organizations are grateful to the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation for their long standing support of Missouri's initiatives for children and families, especially this effort on child protection reform.

This paper is a result of the work of the five child protection demonstration areas across Missouri over the past two years. In December 1996, the nine communities within the five demonstration areas gathered together to share their lessons learned. We thank them for their input and insights to this paper.

The Family and Community Trust appreciates the efforts of the individuals from Citizens for Missouri's Children, the Division of Family Services, and several communities for their comments on the draft of this paper.

Introduction

Like other states, Missouri's statutory mandate for child abuse and neglect concentrates on reporting and investigation procedures, with little reference to supporting families and preventing child abuse. This emphasis on investigation, which is often perceived as "building a case" against the family, shifts the focus away from strengthening families to keep their children

safe. It often places an investigative worker in an adversarial role with families. For parents, services are frequently too little, too late, and too far away.

The enactment of Senate Bill 595 (SB 595) marks a promising step in Missouri's efforts to redline the responsibility for and the response to abused and neglected children and their families. Essentially, this legislation authorizes a demonstration of three types of changes.

- Changing the response to be more flexible to the type of report being made, such as, the seriousness of suspected harm to the child
- Changing the role and relationship of the Division of Family Services and the community in responding to and delivering services to families
- Changing practices and services to embody family support and family centered principles

The purpose of this paper is to capture the insights of those individuals in the demonstration communities across Missouri who are engaged in the implementation of this legislation. The paper presents their lessons learned and challenges being faced as they undertake building a community response to support families and protect children.

The demonstration communities, along with the Citizens for Missouri's Children, the Division of Family Services, and the Family and Community Trust, gathered in December 1996 to take stock of the implementation and identify the lessons learned. The insights and experiences from this meeting formed the basis for this paper.

This paper is for a variety of audiences. It is intended to be a tool for the current demonstration communities as well as for those who are next, the Division of Family Services, legislators, and Missourians who want to know more about what directions can be taken to better respond to families to keep children safe and healthy. This paper is not an evaluation of the implementation. The evaluation results will be reported by the Institute for Applied Research in the fall of 1997.

Implementing Child Protection Reform

SB 595--A New Direction for Keeping Children Safe

Increasing numbers of children are being reported to the Missouri Child Abuse Hotline. These reports span all types of families with all types of abuse or neglect of children. The legal mandate to the Division of Family Services is to assure a timely, thorough response to each report. Over the years, the Division of Family Services has recognized that each response also has to be flexible to the type of report and to the unique strengths and needs of each family. It is increasingly recognized that state government, communities, neighborhoods, or families acting alone cannot reduce or respond effectively to the numbers of children who are abused or neglected.

The goal to have a child protective system that is more responsive to families by being more flexible, community-based, and culturally-sensitive, fueled the development of legislation. In 1994 the General Assembly passed, and Governor Carnahan signed into law, SB 595. This legislation represents the most sweeping changes to the child protective services system in Missouri since the first child abuse and neglect statute was passed in 1975. This legislation changes the relationship of the Division of Family Services with communities and families.

The Vision for Missouri's Child Protection Services Reform

For communities to engage in collaboration that protects children
by planning and implementing coordinated and integrated services
which ensures that every child and family has access to supports.

In passing this landmark legislation, sponsors and supporters of SB 595 identified two primary goals for the child protection services system:

- to protect children from abuse or neglect in the least disruptive and intrusive way, recognizing the value of the family; and
- to provide protection in the most efficient and effective manner possible within the framework of state, community, and family resources.

Essentially, the legislation calls for the Division of Family Services to change the type of response to reports of child abuse and neglect. Additionally, the legislation calls for the Division of Family Services to collaborate with a set of demonstration communities which would assume greater responsibility to develop a community-based network of services and supports to reduce child abuse and neglect. This "type of response" shifts from a *single* investigative response to a *dual* response--investigative and family assessment.

See [SB 595 Vision](#) for a graphic illustration of Missouri's vision of a community response to support families and protect children.

The underlying principle of the child protection services system as embodied in SB 595 is that families coming to the attention of the Division of Family Services have different intervention needs and require different responses from the Division of Family Services and the community.

Principles Guiding Division of Family Services Implementation of the Legislation

- Parents have the primary responsibility for, and are the primary resource for their children.
- All child welfare intervention by state and community agencies has as its first goal the welfare and safety of the child.
- The child protection services system must be designed to be child-focused, family-centered, community-based, and culturally-sensitive.
- The Division of Family Services will collaborate with the community to identify, support, and treat families in a family-supportive, non-threatening manner, in both investigation and family assessment situations.
- A family assessment approach, stressing the strengths of the family, identifying and treating the family's needs, and assuring the safety of the child, is the appropriate approach for reports not requiring law enforcement involvement or the removal of the child.
- Neighborhoods and communities are the primary source of opportunities and supports for families, and have a primary responsibility in assuring the safety and vitality of their members.
- Only a comparatively small percentage of current child abuse and neglect reports are criminal in nature or will result in the removal of the child or alleged perpetrator.
- The Division of Family Services staff who co-investigate serious child abuse and neglect reports with law enforcement, must be competent in law enforcement procedures, fact finding, evidence gathering, etc., as well as effective in social intervention and family assessment.
- Service needs identified with all families should be addressed as quickly and effectively as possible by the Division of Family Services, the community, and the family.
- Services and supports for families are designed to build on the strengths and resources of families and communities.
- The child protective services system should not unnecessarily label families or individuals as either perpetrators of abuse and/or neglect or victims of abuse and/or neglect.

A Dual Response to Reports

Reports that are likely to be criminally prosecuted and identify an act of child abuse and neglect specifically cited in Chapter 210 (Missouri Child Abuse Law) are referred for an investigative response. For this response, law enforcement works in conjunction with the Division of Family Services to gather evidence to substantiate or not substantiate the report, followed by appropriate treatment services. SB 595 does not alter the legal responsibility for the Division of Family Services to investigate reports of child abuse and neglect.

Reports that do not fit the criteria of an investigation, such as those due to environmental factors or family stress, are referred for a family assessment. The family assessment response is designed to engage the family in support and treatment services immediately, without the trauma, stigma, or delay of the investigative process. This dual response is illustrated below.

See [SB 595 Dual Response](#) to see this illustrated.

Demonstration Areas at a Glance

The Division of Family Services selected five areas for the child protection reform demonstration areas through a request for proposals. These areas encompass nine communities in 15 counties and the city of St. Louis. Each of these demonstration areas is unique in its implementation approach, building upon existing strengths, resources, and collaborations within the communities. SB 595 communities have developed using different strategies and are at different maturity levels. Each area either developed a collaborative group in response to SB 595 implementation or built upon an established collaborative group(s). The following map identifies the location of each demonstration area.

See [SB 595 Demonstration Areas](#) to see a map of Missouri with the demonstration areas highlighted.

Considerable efforts were made to link together the SB 595 communities with those communities which are participating in Missouri's cross-system reform effort through the Family and Community Trust. In this reform effort, communities are Community Partnerships or Community Collaboratives to partner with Missouri's departments of Elementary and Secondary Education; Health; Labor and Industrial Relations; Mental Health; and Social Services. Community Partnerships, as emerging county-wide governance structures, are responsible for the implementation of Caring Communities. Caring Communities bring together the neighborhood delivery of integrated services linked with schools, pooled funding streams, and neighborhood-

level decision-making councils. Community Collaboratives are communities that are building their readiness to assume the responsibilities of a Community Partnership.

Five of the demonstration communities for SB 595 are also either Community Partnerships or Community Collaboratives. These communities are: Boone County, St. Louis City, Jefferson County, Phelps County, and Jasper-Newton Counties.

Briefly, each of the demonstration communities was asked to:

- implement the dual-response system with Division of Family Services;
- develop or strengthen a collaborative structure; and
- participate in the evaluation.

Summarized below is a quick glance of each demonstration area's approach to implementation.

1. Central Area

Boone County and Callaway County comprise the Central Area. Each county linked the implementation of SB 595 with existing collaboration.

In Boone County, the Interagency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (I-CAN) is the collaborative group that handles SB 595. I-CAN is a subcommittee of the Columbia/Boone Community Partnership.

No formal SB 595 collaborative team is underway in Callaway County. The Callaway County Human Services Council is linked with the Division of Family Services to implement SB 595. Supports and services needed to assure the safety of children are developed through whichever organization in the county can best respond.

2. South Central Area

The South Central Area includes the four counties of the 25th Judicial Circuit-Maries, Phelps, Pulaski, and Texas.

Maries County is assessing their community to effectively plan and implement SB 595. Phelps County is linked with the Phelps County Community Partnership. FOCUS, the collaborative in Pulaski County, is implementing SB 595. Texas County is linked with the Interagency Team to implement SB 595.

3. Southwest Area

The Southwest Area encompasses two demonstration communities-Jasper and Newton Counties, and Barton, Cedar, and Dade Counties (BARCEDA).

Jasper and Newton Counties

Working together, these two counties are implementing SB 595. They have linked the implementation with their Community Collaborative, Southwest Missouri Community Alliance.

Barton, Cedar, and Dade Counties

These counties are implementing SB 595 in a tri-county area. Their collaborative name-BARCEDA-comes from the first letters of each county. The collaborative is an existing group including school personnel, business leaders, faith community, and community representatives.

4. St. Louis Metropolitan Area

The St. Louis Metropolitan Area consists of three counties-Jefferson, St. Charles, and St. Louis-and the city of St. Louis. Implementation is occurring in St. Louis county and the city of St. Louis using zip code boundaries. In both Jefferson County and St. Charles County, the demonstration encompasses the entire county. A brief description of the demonstration communities follows.

Jefferson County

Together, three organizations are leading in the implementation of SB 595-Jefferson County Community Assistance Network (JC CAN), Jefferson County Community Services Forum, and Jefferson County Family Violence Council.

JC CAN is the Community Partnership, the county-wide governance structure implementing Caring Communities. Jefferson County Community Services Forum provides resource information, coordination of services, and advocacy. Jefferson County

Family Violence Council provides public awareness, professional education, needs identification, resource development, coordination of services, and coordination of agency protocols.

St. Charles County

The implementation is proceeding with two collaboratives in this large county. The Community Response and Empowerment (C.R.E.W.) serves the Wentzville R-IV School District. Community Agencies Respond and Empowerment (C.A.R.E.) serves the zip code 63301.

St. Louis County

Three communities in St. Louis County cover the zip code areas of 63130 (University City), 63143 (Maplewood), and 63132 (Olivette). In each of these demonstration communities, linkages are being forged with existing groups to implement SB 595. For example, in Maplewood, the SB 595 Council and the Caring Communities Governance Council at A.B. Green Middle School have merged. They are now the Maplewood-Richmond Heights Family and Community Alliance.

St. Louis City

St. Louis City is integrating their implementation with Sigel Community Education Center which serves the southeast section of the city encompassing zip codes 63104 and 63118. Sigel Community Education Center is also a Caring Communities. The Center is one of four sites participating in a national project to build a family-support response to child abuse and neglect funded by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation.

5. Washington County Area

SB 595 is being implemented county-wide in Washington County. The Community 2000 group is the collaborative working with the Division of Family Services on implementation.

Getting Ready for Implementation

Citizens for Missouri's Children, the Division of Family Services, and the Family and Community Trust collaborated together to assist communities to begin implementing SB 595. This assistance took the form of community meetings, training sessions, statewide networking gatherings, resource materials, and on-site assistance. All of these efforts combined contributed to furthering the communities' understanding of the scope of SB 595, what is expected to be accomplished in the implementation phase, and what it takes to build a community response to support families. A summary of these activities are described below.

Community Meetings

During the summer of 1995, the three statewide partners conducted a SB 595 informational meeting in each of the nine demonstration communities. These meetings gathered representatives from various public and private agencies, community organizations, and some parents for a briefing on the scope of SB 595. For several communities, these meetings served as the launching pad for the development of the collaborative implementation group. More than 600 people participated in these meetings.

Training Sessions

The Division of Family Services conducted training sessions for its children's service workers in all of the demonstration areas. The training focused on protocols for both the investigative and the family assessment response. The Family and Community Trust organized training sessions for all nine demonstration communities on community assessment, implementing family support practices, involving parents, delivering services, and networking. The Family Resource Coalition conducted the training sessions.

Statewide Networking

Citizens for Missouri's Children organized statewide networking meetings in July 1995 and March 1996. These meetings focused on communities sharing their successes and challenges in the implementation process.

Resource Materials

A resource guide, *Building a Community Response to Protect Children and Support Families: A Planning Resource Guide for SB 595 Communities*, was developed by the Family and Community Trust to assist communities in their implementation process. After the first year, a self-assessment tool, *Building a Community Response to Support Families and Protect Children*, was developed by the Family and Community Trust and the Division of Family Services. Communities utilized this tool to self-assess their progress in implementing SB 595, and identify resources needed to strengthen their capacity to implement SB 595.

Each of the statewide partners provided staff support to deliver on-site assistance to communities. The assistance encompassed a range of activities including strategic planning; building collaborations; improving communication between communities and the Division of Family Services; identifying approaches to link service delivery; and designing training sessions.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned Summary

- [Lesson #1](#): All partners must value and practice collaboration to successfully implement SB 595.
- [Lesson #2](#): A clear understanding of SB 595 is essential to the community and the Division of Family Services in order to collaborate together.
- [Lesson #3](#): A shared community vision provides a direction to guide the planning and implementation process.
- [Lesson #4](#): The greater the scope of change, the greater the resistance to change.
- [Lesson #5](#): Building relationships is key to changing perceptions among community stakeholders.
- [Lesson #6](#): All communities have strengths that can be drawn upon to better serve families.
- [Lesson #7](#): Creating separate groups for new initiatives works against community collaboration.
- [Lesson #8](#): Inclusive membership of a collaborative is integral for success.
- [Lesson #9](#): On-going leadership development sustains collaboration.
- [Lesson #10](#): Developing networks among SB 595 communities supports implementation.

In the course of this demonstration, community participants have identified many successes, challenges, and risks to implementing a dual-response system to child protection. This demonstration has served to stretch thinking as well as relationships. Early on, stakeholders recognized that the implementation could move forward only if there is strong involvement and input from community members themselves.

Communities were asked to share their experiences-their learnings-with one another in December 1996. The Family and Community Trust convened the meeting to capture the lessons learned. Nearly 60 people from the nine demonstration communities participated. They included front-line staff, Division of Family Services' managers, parents, public and private service providers, school administrators, and child care providers.

Three overarching themes encompass the communities' experience with the demonstration-shared knowledge, community empowerment, and sustained collaboration. What follows is a brief description of the lessons learned within these three themes.

Lesson 1: All partners must value and practice collaboration to successfully implement SB 595

"We see the advantage of working together and of knowing how to collaborate."

In the 1990's, collaboration is many things-a buzz word, a goal, a way of doing business, and a sign that relationships are changing among parents, agencies, communities, and government.

Communities found they had to go beyond the rhetoric of collaboration. They had to value and practice collaboration to be partners in developing a dual-response system to child protection in their communities. Collaboration among the stakeholders was the only pathway to ownership. Implementation moved forward in those communities where stakeholders identified what collaboration meant, how they would design referrals for services, which agencies could provide various support services, how workers could team together to respond to a family's needs, and how resources could be pooled. Collaboration was effective in breaking down the common barriers of turf issues, separate agendas, and restricted resources. In those communities where the commitment to collaborate have to materialize, there are struggles in implementing a community response. Demonstration communities identified a range of barriers to collaboration.

- Confidentiality rules which discourage sharing information across public and private agencies
- Bureaucratic "red tape"
- Overlapping goals and competition for the same limited resources among partners
- Perception of competition for resources or clients
- Lack of common language, definition, and priorities among partners
- State and local policies that work against collaboration

Lesson #2: A clear understanding of SB 595 is essential to the community and the Division of Family Services in order to collaborate together.

"The community and the Division of Family Services need to understand the difference between investigations and assessments."

The planning process was designed to bring together a diverse range of stakeholders to work together in developing the dual-response approach. One of the experiences in the planning process was the lack of a common base of knowledge about SB 595. It became increasingly clear that different people had different knowledge about Missouri's child protection system. Some stakeholders identified that people need to understand how the current investigative process works before they begin to shift to a dual response. The different understandings of both the current and dual response slowed the planning process at times and added confusion rather than clarity for planning groups. More extensive and intensive orientation sessions are warranted as new communities are engaged.

Lesson #3: A shared community vision provides a direction to guide the planning and implementation process.

"Our visioning exercise allowed tremendous discussion on child safety and how the new approach keeps kids safe."

SB 595 communities that utilized a visioning process found that it stimulated some very rich conversations. A visioning process focused attention on child and family safety as well as prevention. The shared vision became an asset to guide the planning and implementation process. As the members planned together, they re-visited whether the proposed approaches are in line with their vision statement.

Through developing a shared vision, members were able to understand more fully the individual interests, beliefs, expectations, and commitment of one another. An added benefit was that it provided an opportunity to build relationships among the members. Building a consensus around their collective vision took time, patience, and many revisions. However, communities found that the results outweighed the cost. They identified that with a shared vision there is widespread ownership and investment.

Lesson #4: The greater the scope of change, the greater the resistance to change.

"(SB 595) provides Division of Family Services with an opportunity to join with the community in a new way. It encourages families to ask for services."

SB 595 is opening the door of opportunity to make significant changes when a report of child abuse is made. These changes encompass what happens when a report is made, how the response is made, who makes the response, and where the response occurs.

Communities are finding that the opportunity for change does not come without challenges, risks, and resistance. Parents, the Division of Family Services, private agency staff, community organizations, advocates, police, hospitals, and schools alike, are experiencing shifts in their relationships with one another as they are seeking to change the system.

Developing a neighborhood network to bring services which are welcoming, accessible, and likely to be used changes how workers currently provide services. Changing how services are delivered is changing the roles and responsibilities of staff. It is teaming together for training, intake, and actually delivering the services to a family. Changing who delivers the services is determining who can best respond whether they are from the Division of Family Services, schools, agency staff, community organizations, or parents themselves.

Communities are grappling with a range of issues and risks that are part of this change. With a shared response to treatment with a family, who is responsible if a child dies from abuse? What are the liability and malpractice implications? Will current jobs be secure?

As communities move from planning to implementing the legislation, they encounter different degrees of resistance to the changes being proposed. Of course, the degree of resistance varies in many communities. The resistance is being attributed not only to the amount of change being called for, it is also being attributed to not having the answers to what the impact of the change will be.

Lesson #5: Building relationships is key to changing perceptions among community stakeholders.

"Initial contact with the family has changed. Now, it is more user-friendly."

Community planning groups recognized early on that "perception is reality." Some perceptions were barriers to developing a community network of supports that used a dual-response approach to reports of child mistreatment. This was especially true for parents whose own experience with the existing child protection system, and especially with the Division of Family

Services, was not positive. Too often they felt excluded from decision-making, fearful that their children would be removed from their home, confused about what was to happen next, and not listened to about their needs. Interestingly, workers from different agencies shared similar perceptions about one another-unresponsive to requests, unwilling to share information, and having a negative attitude.

Communities found that changing perceptions is not an easy process. They found that building relationships is one effective strategy. Meeting together, time after time enables people to get to know one another instead of knowing their "stereotype." Consistent and frequent communication leads to increased trust and understanding among members. Communication leads to separating agency policy from individuals. Alliances are being formed inside and outside the agency to help change procedures and practices that are not supportive of a quick, collaborative service response for families.

Lesson #6: All communities have strengths that can be drawn upon to better serve families.

"Look at community assets. Let's focus on priorities based on community strengths and needs."

Demonstration communities were asked to conduct an asset mapping exercise to determine the range of resources and strengths within their communities. The assessment included looking at informal supports, services, training opportunities, and needs within the community. From this activity, numerous resources were "uncovered" in each of the communities. Assumptions that there were really no or few resources in a community were dispelled.

Many communities also used this exercise as a strategy to engage neighborhood residents in the mapping process. This was an added benefit for residents and communities who learned about the informal resources that were available. It also enhanced the credibility of the collaborative planning group.

Lesson #7: Creating separate groups for new initiatives works against community collaboration.

"Attach (SB 595) onto activities, groups, programs, etc. that are already in place."

The increased popularity of collaboration in recent years has led to establishing collaborative planning or oversight groups when communities or agencies are implementing new initiatives. At times this approach results in "categorical collaboration." Collaborations are formed around a specific issue such as child abuse, early childhood education, teen violence, or childhood immunizations. Many members of these collaborations go from one meeting to the next where they see each other again. Some people comment that "all I do all day is collaborate." Early on, the implementation of SB 595 was viewed as another one of these "categorical collaborations."

To address this duplication in collaboration, several of the selected SB 595 areas were Community Partnerships (Boone County) or Community Collaboratives (Jefferson County, Jasper/Newton Counties, and Phelps County). These communities integrated SB 595 with their existing community decision-making structure, thus, pulling together county-wide initiatives under one decision-making structure.

Lesson #8: Inclusive membership of a collaborative is integral for success.

"Look at the composition of the lead group to determine inclusiveness/ representiveness and diversity of the community."

SB 595 communities have found that public and private service providers are well represented in the implementation of this initiative. Each community identified that they want to increase the diversity of their membership. Through self-assessment, communities identified that certain groups, listed below, were not often included in the collaborative group.

- Parents
- Youth
- Employers/Business
- Neighborhood associations
- Advocates
- School board members

Communities found a range of effective strategies for building an inclusive membership base. Some of these strategies include: a clear purpose; expectations for involvement; focus on building relationships; a flexible approach when scheduling meetings, activities, and involvement strategies; and utilizing facilitators who are skilled in building group consensus.

Communities are placing a top priority on recruiting and involving more parents and business community representatives. Communities identified the following strategies to involve parents and the business community.

- Listening to parents and identifying areas for parents to be valued for their contributions
- Providing child care, transportation, and food
- Attending meetings, fairs, or events that attract families as a way to recruit parents
- Partnering with other programs and/or initiatives that have strong parent involvement, for example, Head Start and Neighborhood Associations
- Making parents feel comfortable in the group and planning process
- Identifying those who can approach the business community easily, for example, Chamber of Commerce, United Way, and the faith community
- Finding ways to involve the business community
- Providing tax incentives to invest in the community, for example, Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP) and Youth Opportunities Program

Lesson #9: On-going leadership development sustains collaboration.

"Mobilize leaders to assess problems and solutions to bigger issues."

With the strong community focus of SB 595, planners have found it important that the leadership is representative of the community and responsive to the needs and interests of the group.

Communities have found that leadership skills make a difference in the progress and success of their collaborative. Consensus building, negotiation, facilitation, and bridging different interests are skills that SB 595 communities identified as critical for leadership. In several communities, the initial leadership has changed. These communities learned that to avoid set backs, continuous development and identification of leadership is integral in maintaining their momentum needed to move forward.

Lesson #10: Developing networks among SB 595 communities supports implementation.

"We feel like we are not in this alone."

Communities have begun to build networks across demonstration areas. Supporting relationship-building and peer-to-peer learning within the demonstration areas as well as between demonstration communities minimizes the feelings of isolation. At statewide and regional meetings, communities are having the opportunity to share information about their progress and challenges and to brainstorm possible solutions and approaches with their peers. Training sessions reinforce knowledge and help develop new skills that can be applied in their respective communities.

Future Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges Summary

- **Challenge #1:** Operating a demonstration community while maintaining the existing system
- **Challenge #2:** Defining a process for changing policies and procedures
- **Challenge #3:** Improving partnerships with families
- **Challenge #4:** Integrating multiple initiatives
- **Challenge #5:** Increasing the application of technology

Implementing a new initiative is difficult. Communities, the Division of Family Services, and private agencies are continually challenged to bring together their best ideas and resources to implement SB 595. Both the Division of Family Services and communities will need to continue jointly facing and resolving these challenges over time.

The Division of Family Services and the Missouri Legislature will determine if there will be an expansion of the child protection service reform based on an independent evaluation of SB 595 implementation.

The challenges listed below are those identified by the nine demonstration communities when they gathered together in December 1996.

Challenge #1: Operating a demonstration community while maintaining the existing system

Managing the implementation of SB 595 while working on other job-related responsibilities is a challenge for SB 595 communities. Finding the time, resources, and personnel to handle coordination activities, community outreach, marketing, and service delivery has spread many community stakeholders very thin. The job responsibilities and contributions that can

be made by front-line workers will have to be re-examined. The changes in responsibilities include allocating time for front-line workers to provide more direct services to families and community development activities. This re-examination will bring change in job descriptions to reflect the changing role and responsibilities of front-line workers in the Division of Family Services and in private agencies.

SB 595 communities need the support of ongoing technical assistance provided locally in the areas of facilitation, mediation, training, strategic planning, and collaborative development. The actual "how to's" of community development activities, staff to carry out such functions, and the resources to support these efforts is a key challenge being faced by planning groups.

Challenge #2: Defining a process for changing policies and procedures

Communities are seeking a procedure that facilitates making recommendations for changes to support the planning and implementation of SB 595. This includes open communication with the designated person or unit that is responsible for collecting the recommendations, reviewing the information, and informing the communities regarding the changes. Communities also believe that the evaluation component should be integrated with their overall planning and implementation process.

Challenge #3: Improving partnerships with families

Communities agree that an indication of "doing business differently" is families seen as true decision-makers at the table with public and private service providers and other stakeholders.

SB 595 communities are recruiting and involving parents and families in the planning and implementation process. There is agreement that the best way to proceed with redesigning the service delivery system in the community is to involve diverse representation of the community, especially involving parents. In order to learn ways to improve their partnership, SB 595 communities are reaching out to organizations, agencies, and associations that have experience in partnering with families.

Challenge #4: Integrating multiple initiatives

With communities implementing several initiatives simultaneously, and many of them calling upon the development of a collaborative group to implement the initiative, communities eventually reach a saturation point. Therefore, what was meant to improve the delivery of services or systems, only further confuses or weakens the impact of the community's effort.

Communities are seeking how to integrate multiple initiatives on the state and local level to strengthen services for children and families while maximizing the skills and talents within communities.

Challenge #5: Increasing the application of technology

The utilization and importance of technology in our society is reflected in the challenges faced by SB 595 communities. The utilization of computers, laptop computers, electronic mail, and the Internet are all technology identified by communities as supports that are needed to move the implementation process forward. Utilizing technology can be a valuable method to share information between communities, maintain current documentation, share and use the technology with families, and enhance internal as well as external communication. One proposed application of this technology proposed by a community member was the development of a statewide SB 595 calendar.

Summary

Thousands of Missourians-ranging from parents to the Division of Family Services workers, from corporate leaders to teachers-are engaged in trying to make a simple, yet monumental change in their communities. They are collaborating together so their communities will be able to provide a network of supports and services for families. This network is to keep children safe and healthy in their families, and to help parents to keep their children safe.

Are Missourians in the SB 595 communities succeeding? Is the response to a report of child abuse or neglect more appropriate? Is it more flexible to the needs and strengths of the families? Are families getting what they need, when they need it, and where they need it-in their own neighborhood? Answers are not yet available to these questions. The signs indicate that communities are encountering a road with many curves and hills. Yet, the signs are also promising that communities are on the right road to a vision of having integrated services to ensure that every child and family has access to supports that will help keep children safe.
